

## And they established their genealogy according to their families. (1:18)

Each tribe carried out its own census. In this manner, one had to clearly establish from which tribe he hailed. Family purity was a strict requirement, so that the merit of their forefathers could stand in their stead during times of crisis. *Chazal* (*Pesachim* 49a) teach that one should seek the daughter of a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, as a wife. This serves to ensure the bloodlines, applying the analogy of *Invei ha'gefen, b'invei ha'gefen, davar na'eh u'miskabeil*; "A combination of the grapes of a vine with the grapes of another vine; which is something fine and acceptable." [Since both parties hail from a family of Torah scholars, they can both be compared to the grapes of a vine. Their union is, thus, like the wine produced from the grapes of two vines. Such wine is particularly flavorful, since it is a product of two vines, each enhancing and complementing the other's product.] We see from here the role that *yichus*, lineage/pedigree, plays in a marriage. As an added caveat, *yichus* is compared to "zeros"; it all depends where one places the "one." if it precedes the zeros, it elevates the value. If it follows the zeros, then it diminishes the value exponentially.

The following story is well-known. I repeat it due to its powerful lesson and as a segue into another story, whose lesson is also quite appropriate and significant. The *Baruch Taam*, *Horav Baruch Frankel Teumim, zl*, was an illustrious *Rav* and leader of Galician and Moravian Jewry. His son, *Horav Yehoshua Heshel, zl, m'Komarna*, traveled to Tarnograd, Ukraine, to meet the young man who had distinguished himself as the *illui*, genius, of Tarnograd, who later became known as *Horav Chaim Sanzer*, the *Divrei Chaim*. After speaking in learning with the young man, *Rav* Yehoshua Heshel was so impressed that he could not wait to return home to encourage his parents to take this young man as a husband for his sister. When word went out that the *Baruch Taam* was taking a son-in-law from Tarnograd, the students in his *yeshivah* became visibly upset. After all, it was not as if the *Baruch Taam's* *yeshivah* did not include young men who were brilliant scholars. Why go elsewhere when an "identical" scholar could be found in one's own *yeshivah*? The students even sent "spies" to check out the *illui* of Tarnograd. They discovered that, indeed, he was a Talmudic scholar without peer, righteous and ethical to match. He did, however, have one physical impediment: he limped badly, as one leg was shorter than the other.

"How could our illustrious *Rav* take a son-in-law who is not physically perfect?" was the foolish question that the jealous young men were asking. [Such a comment in and of itself explains why they were passed over.] "Why did *Rav* Yehoshua Heshel not inform his father and sister of this "development"? [After meeting the young man, he was so utterly impressed that he felt his physical impediment did not matter.]

The *Baruch Taam* asked his son the same question: "Why did you not inform me of his condition?" *Rav* Yehoshua Heshel explained that his father might not have agreed to the match. He felt that once he met *Rav* Chaim, he would be so overjoyed that his condition would go unnoticed. While this rationale assuaged the *Baruch Taam*, his daughter, Rachel Faige, who was a special

young woman in her own right, demanded to have a say in the matter. She wanted to meet the man whom everyone wanted and expected her to marry.

It was settled – *Rav Chaim* was coming for a visit to meet with the *Baruch Taam*, and (if that went well) afterwards he would meet his daughter. The *Baruch Taam* was very impressed with the young man's brilliance. He could not believe that such a young person was so erudite. Nonetheless, his daughter would have to reconcile herself to one condition. The future *chassan* and *kallah* met for a short while, and, after their meeting, the *kallah* fully agreed to the match. What did they talk about?

The traditional tale is that *Rav Chaim* asked her to look in the mirror. What she saw unnerved and frightened her, because she saw herself bent and limping in pain. Her face portrayed the extreme pain that she was experiencing with each step. *Rav Chaim* said, "You see now what was the original Heavenly decree. Knowing that I was your predestined *chassan*, I prayed before He Who rests upon High to transfer this impediment to me. I have experienced this pain for years, so that you would not endure the agony and shame. Now, if you want to forgo and ignore this, I absolve you from the *shidduch*." Rachel Faige understood that before her stood an unusual, saintly man. She acquiesced to the marriage and, as a result, merited to be the progenitress of the *Admorim* of Shiniev, Kishanev, Sanz, Gorlitz and Bobov.

Not all *yichus* is positive. Even the most negative *yichus*, however, can be (by the right, positive-thinking person) ameliorated and used favorably. The *Bostoner Rebbe, zl*, related the story of a young *baalas teshuvah*, penitent, from America, who had spent *Shabbos* in Har Nof with the *Rebbe*, and returned a week later to ask for a *brachah*. In the course of the conversation, the *Rebbe* asked her how she had become such a determined *baalas teshuvah*. She replied, "It began with my grandfather. He once called me in and said, 'I want you to remember three things: remember that you are Jewish; remember *Shabbos*; remember me.'

"His statement left a powerful impression on me, but, since our home was far from religious, I was rather at a loss. [It is unclear if the grandfather was maternal or paternal.] I started out by lighting candles Friday night. Every Friday night, I faithfully lit the *Shabbos* candles... week in and week out. And every Friday night (like clockwork), when my father saw the candles, he proceeded to quickly extinguish them. So, I became observant because of my grandfather... and my father."

She spoke these words with complete seriousness, as if almost matter of fact. At best, this seemed baffling. How did her father assist in her becoming observant?

"Your father?" the *Rebbe* asked. "He is the one who put out your candles every week. Why would you attribute your successful journey to religion also to your father?"

"Yes," she said, "it was my father who made me realize that if he could so obstinately continue in his persistence to extinguish my *Shabbos* candles, I could just as stubbornly continue to keep them

burning. So, I became religious because of both my grandfather and my father.”

We are able to learn a great deal from the positive influences which we encounter, and from the negative ones as well. When we withstand the negative, we transform them and strengthen ourselves in the process. Obviously, we could discuss this anecdote in much more detail, but I will leave that up to the reader.